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What to do when you can't randomize?

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Some practical advice based on the experience of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)

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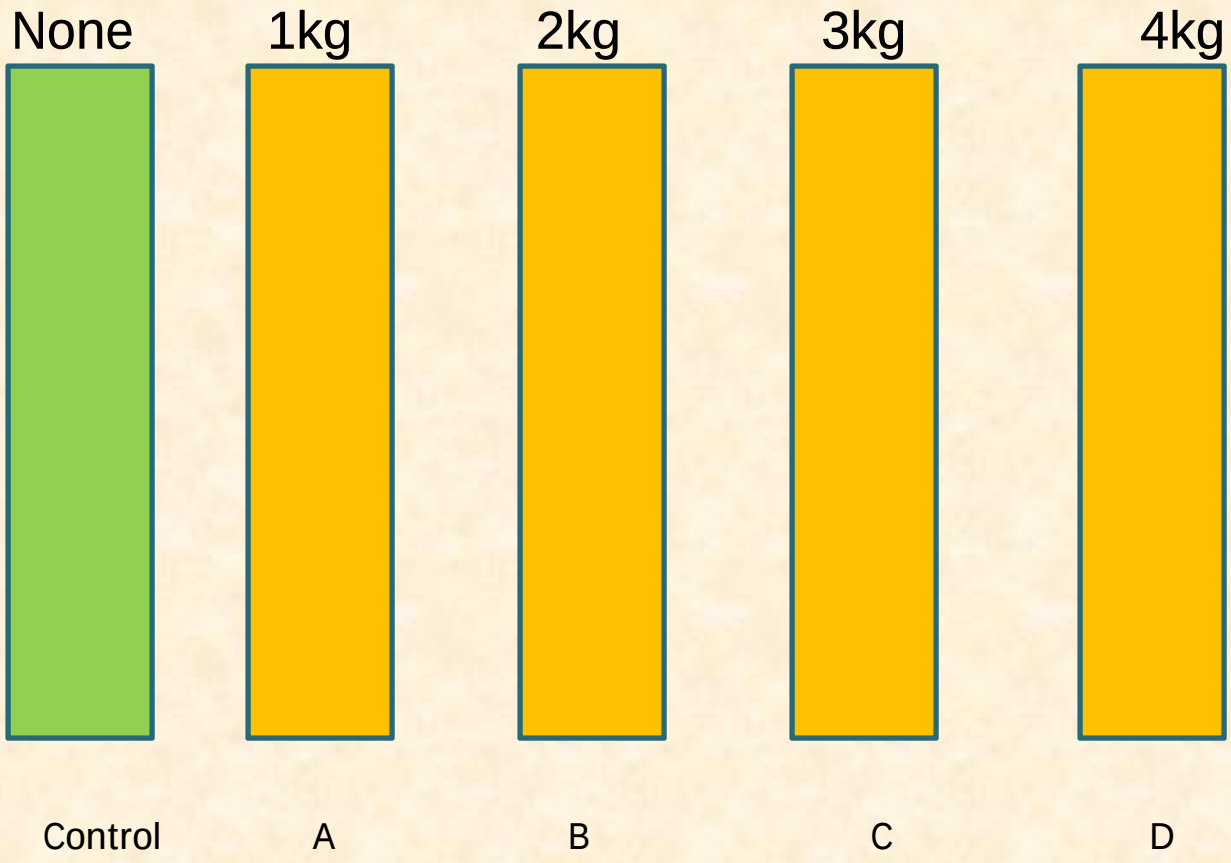
The Classic Experimental Design

Testing the impact of varying amounts of fertilizer on corn yields



Main challenges in applying the classic experimental design to DG programs:

- The "rows of corn" (i.e., villages, municipalities, ministries, schools, cooperatives) are NOT identical prior the initiation of the project
  - ✓They differ in terms of education, income, urbanization, etc.
  - ✓Unless controlled for, those could mislead diagnosis of (a) causes of problem to be solved, and/or (b) impact of program on problem
- Reluctance to justify expenditure of resources on collecting data where USAID is not carrying out programs

Solution: Difference-in-Difference Design

- Highlights the importance of collecting national-level data, which are often also already being collected, so there is no added cost
- Determine differences in starting levels with a baseline survey of the selected units
- Compare baseline surveys of treatment areas/institutions (i.e., experimental areas) to national baseline data
- Track changes in both treatment and control groups over the life of the project (e.g., mid-term and end of project)

Step-by-step Guide to Impact Determination

I. Do you have a problem?
   a) Does your country exhibit scores at the national level that suggest your country does worse than others in your region?

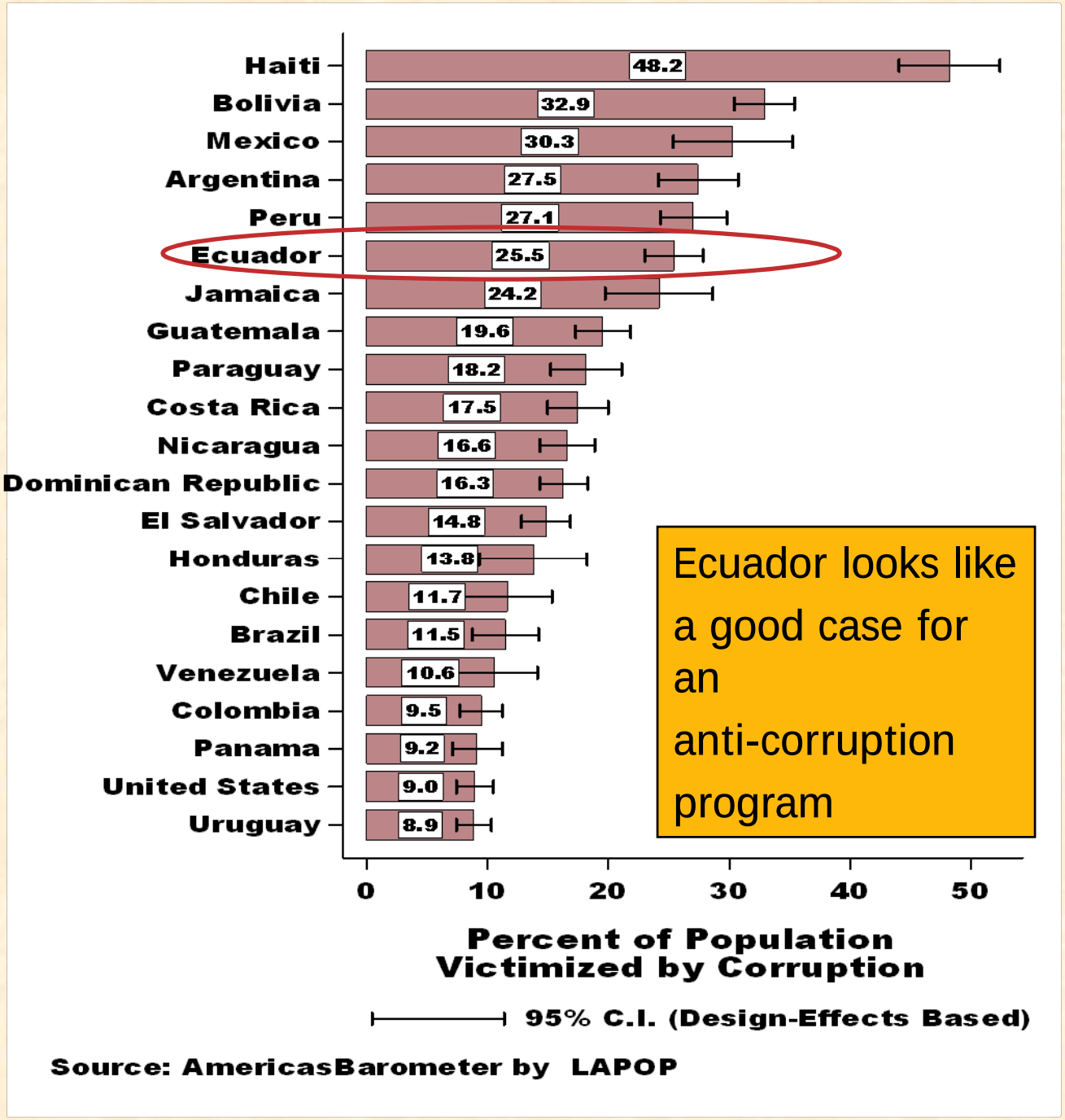
II. If it does have a problem, are the regions/institutions you are choosing actually the ones that are problematical?

III. Do those regions/institutions achieve a *significant* improvement over time?

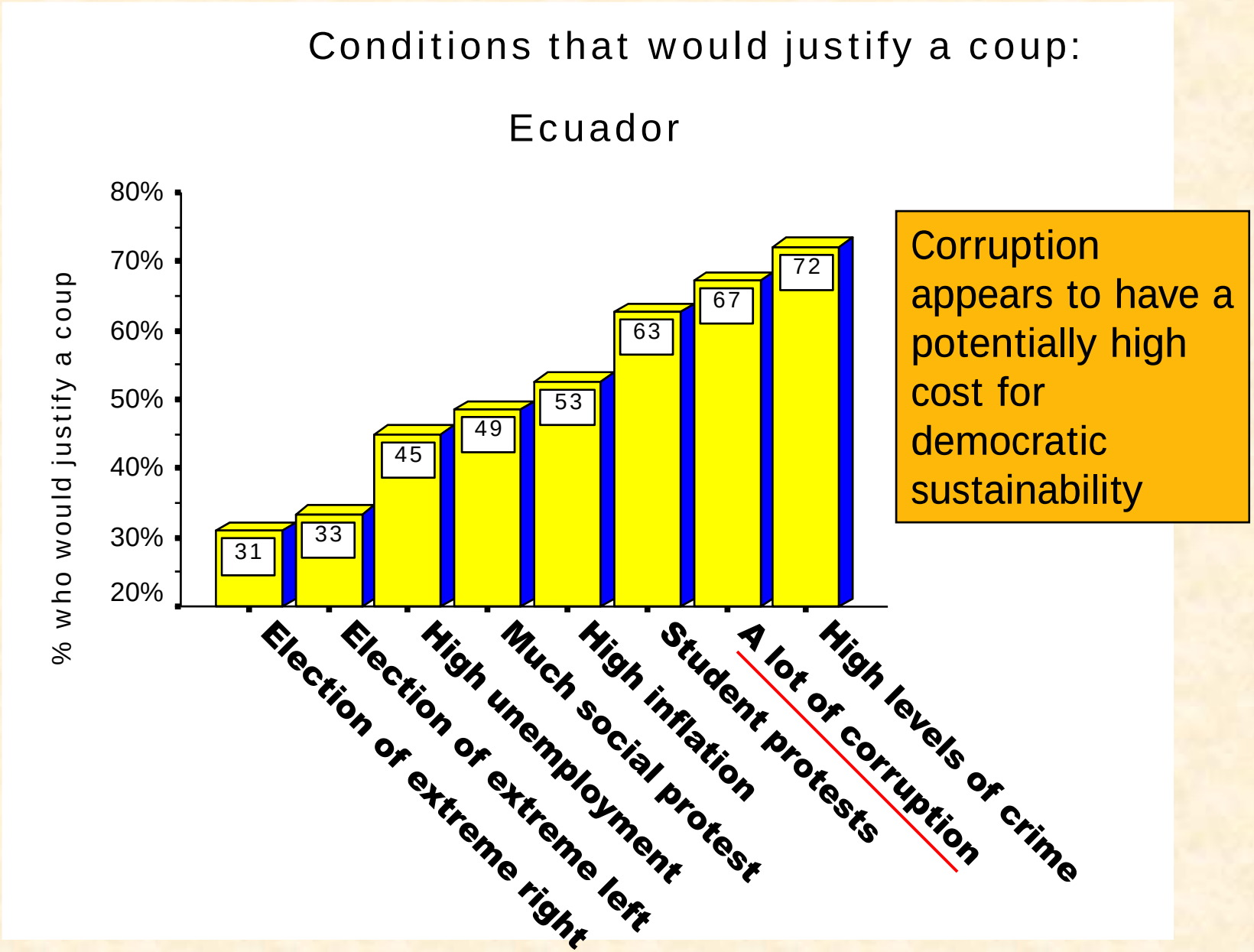
Sample size must be large enough to detect proposed target changes

Sample Size	Approximate Confidence Interval
100	±10%
300	± 5.8%
500	±4.5%
800	±3.5%

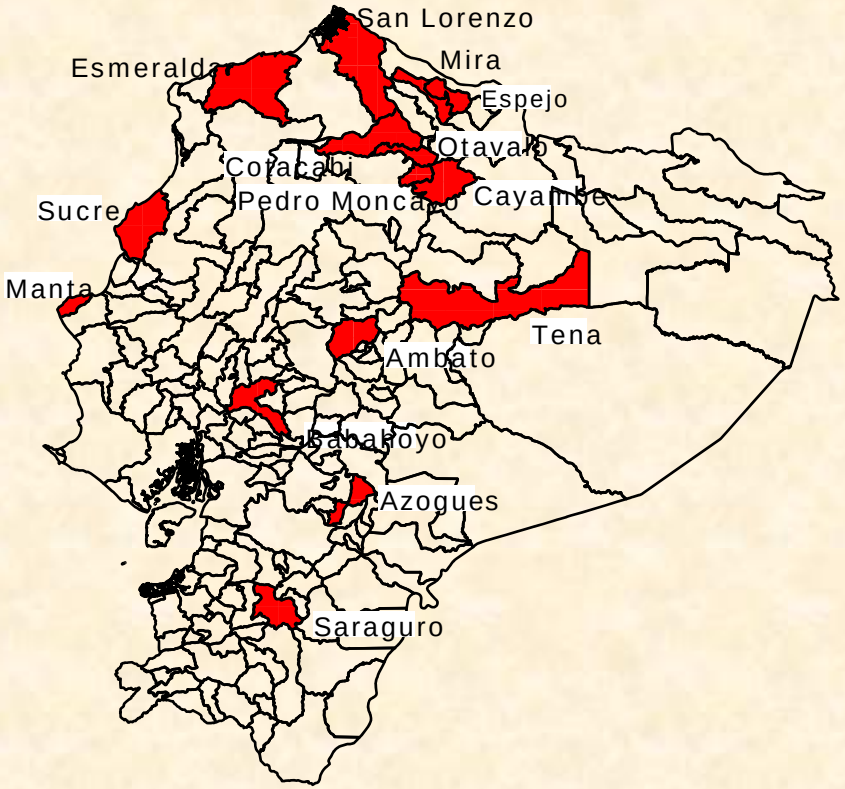
- Assumes simple random sampling. Stratification will reduce this confidence interval while clustering will increase it.
- If your target change is smaller than the confidence interval, you have to either increase your sample size or increase your target change



Comparative corruption victimization levels: The Americas, 2008

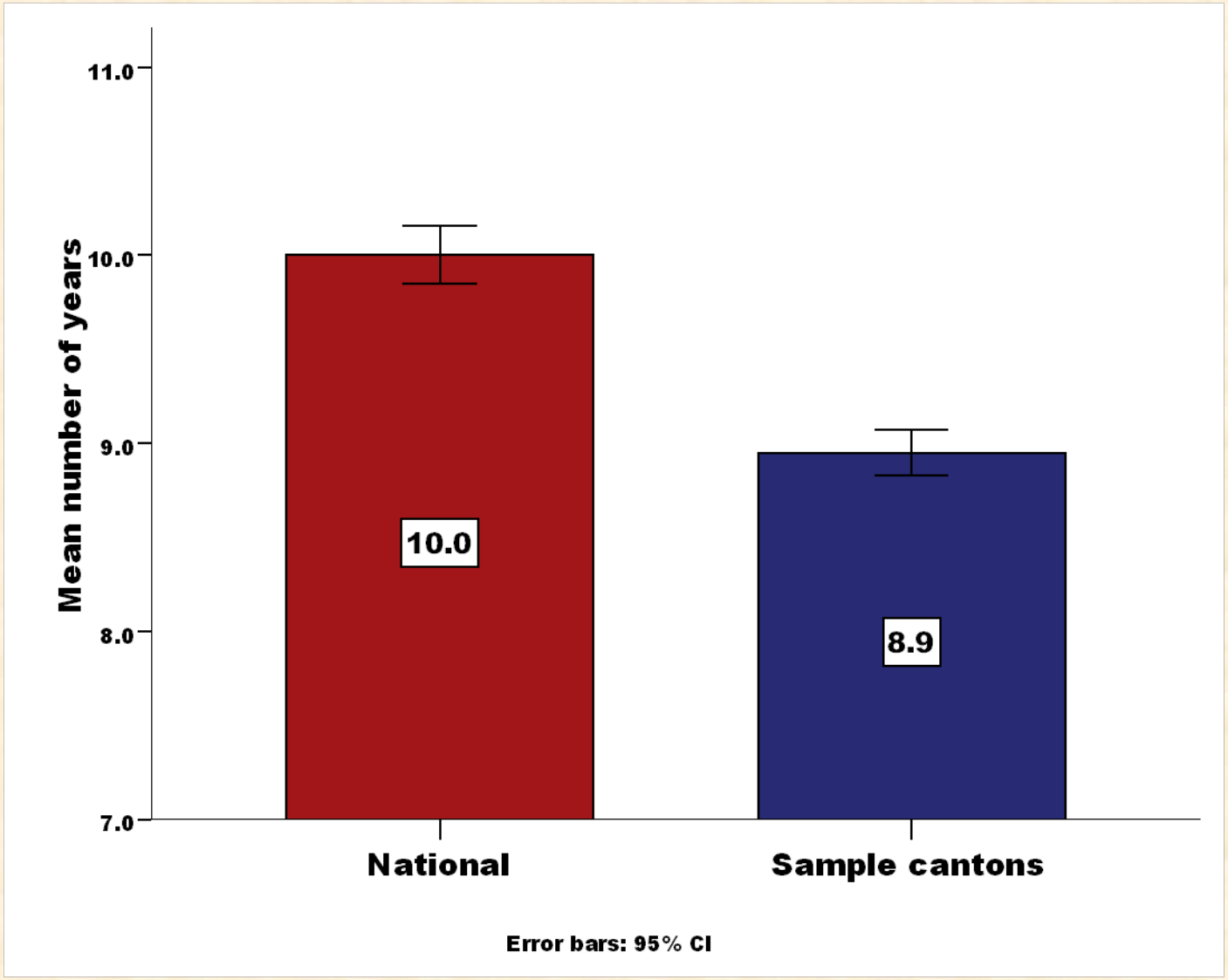

Conditions that would justify a coup:
Ecuador
% who would justify a coup
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
31
33
45
49
53
63
67
72
Election of extreme right
Election of extreme left
High unemployment
Much social protest
High inflation
Student protests
A lot of corruption
High levels of crime
Corruption appears to have a potentially high cost for democratic sustainability

Municipal Development in Ecuador: Baseline Survey



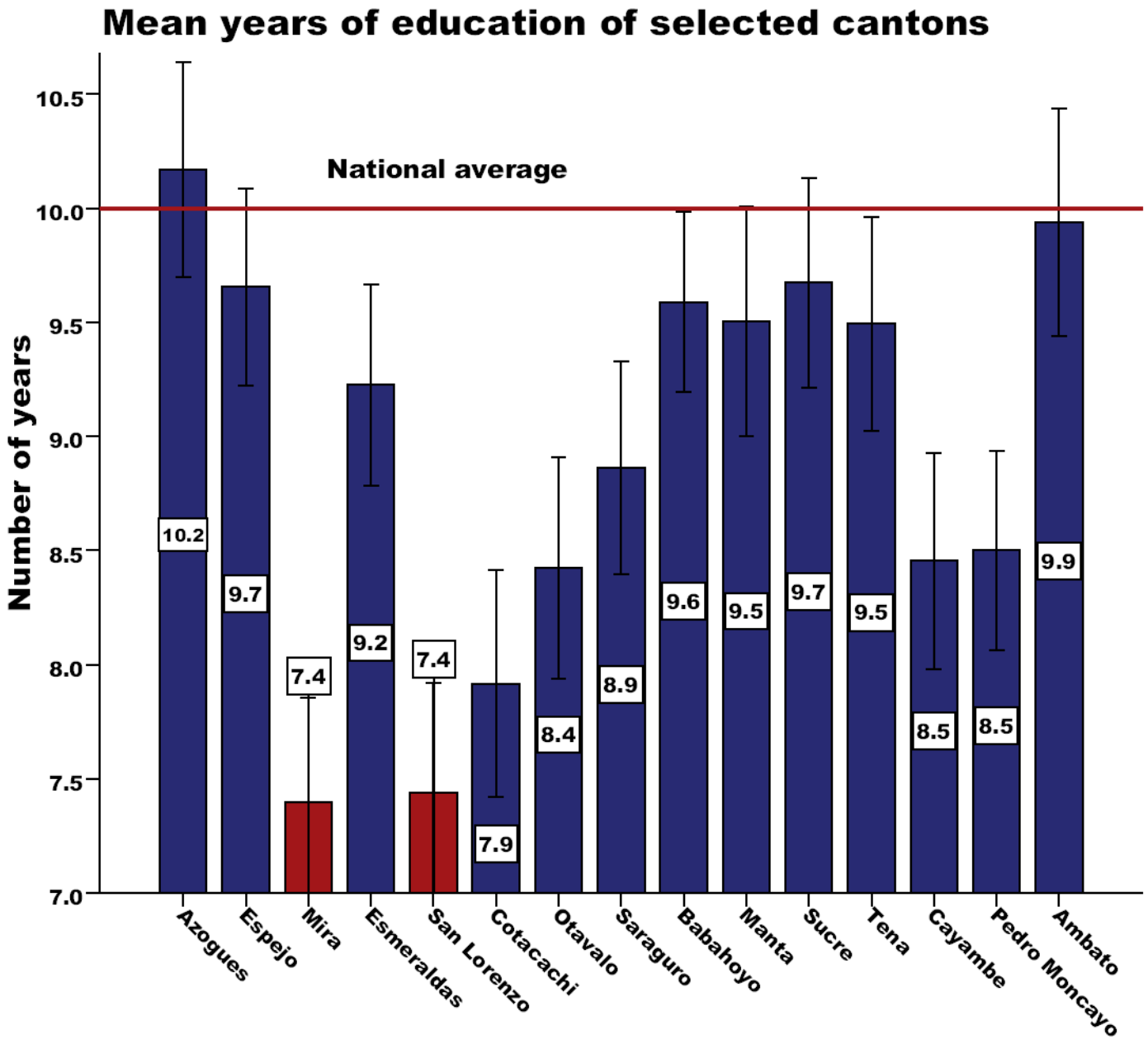
Potential to capitalize on a municipal development study by applying an anti-corruption strategy focused on these cantons

Number of years of education, national vs. sample cantons



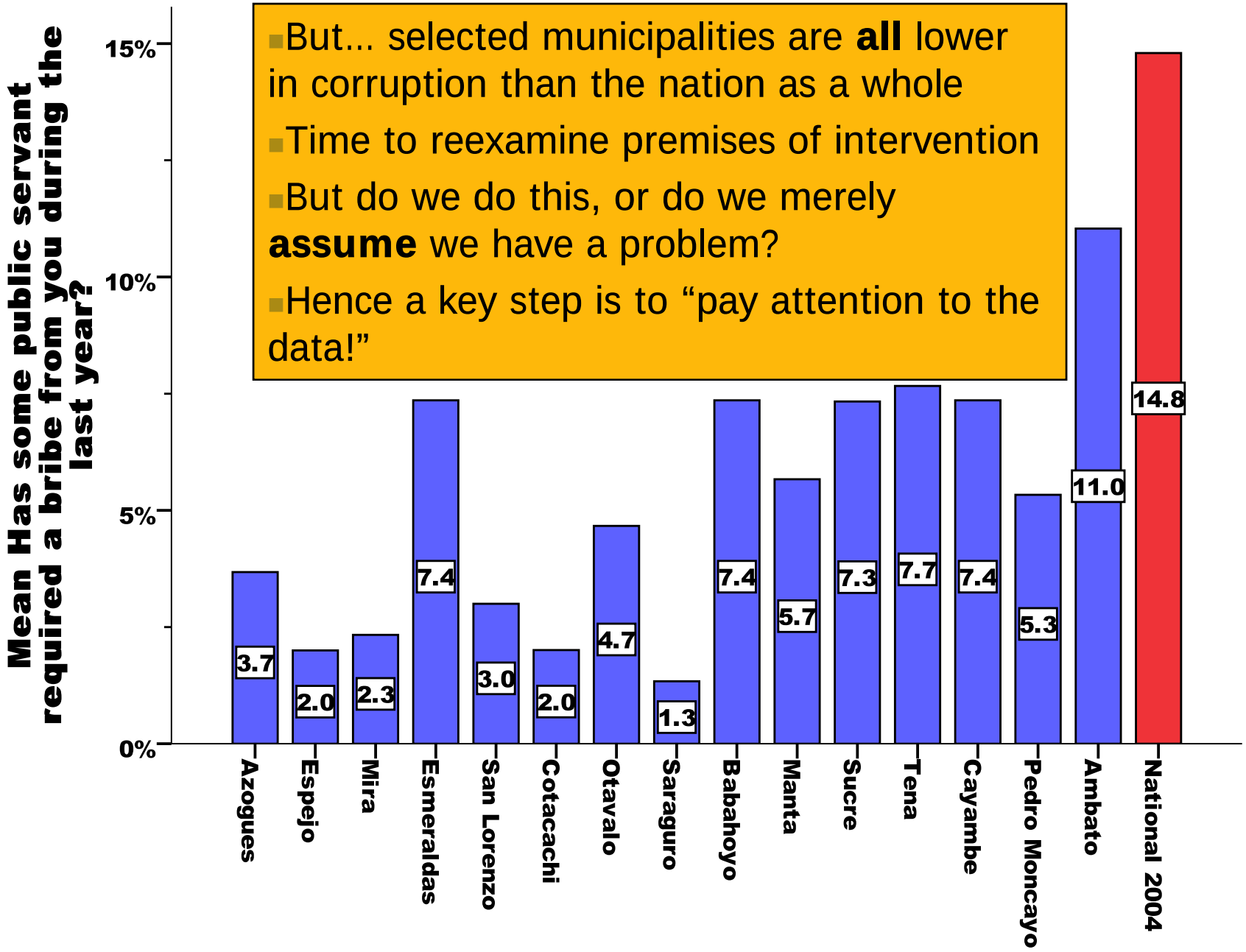
But first:

determine if selected municipalities differ in basic characteristics from the nation as a whole so that these can be controlled for

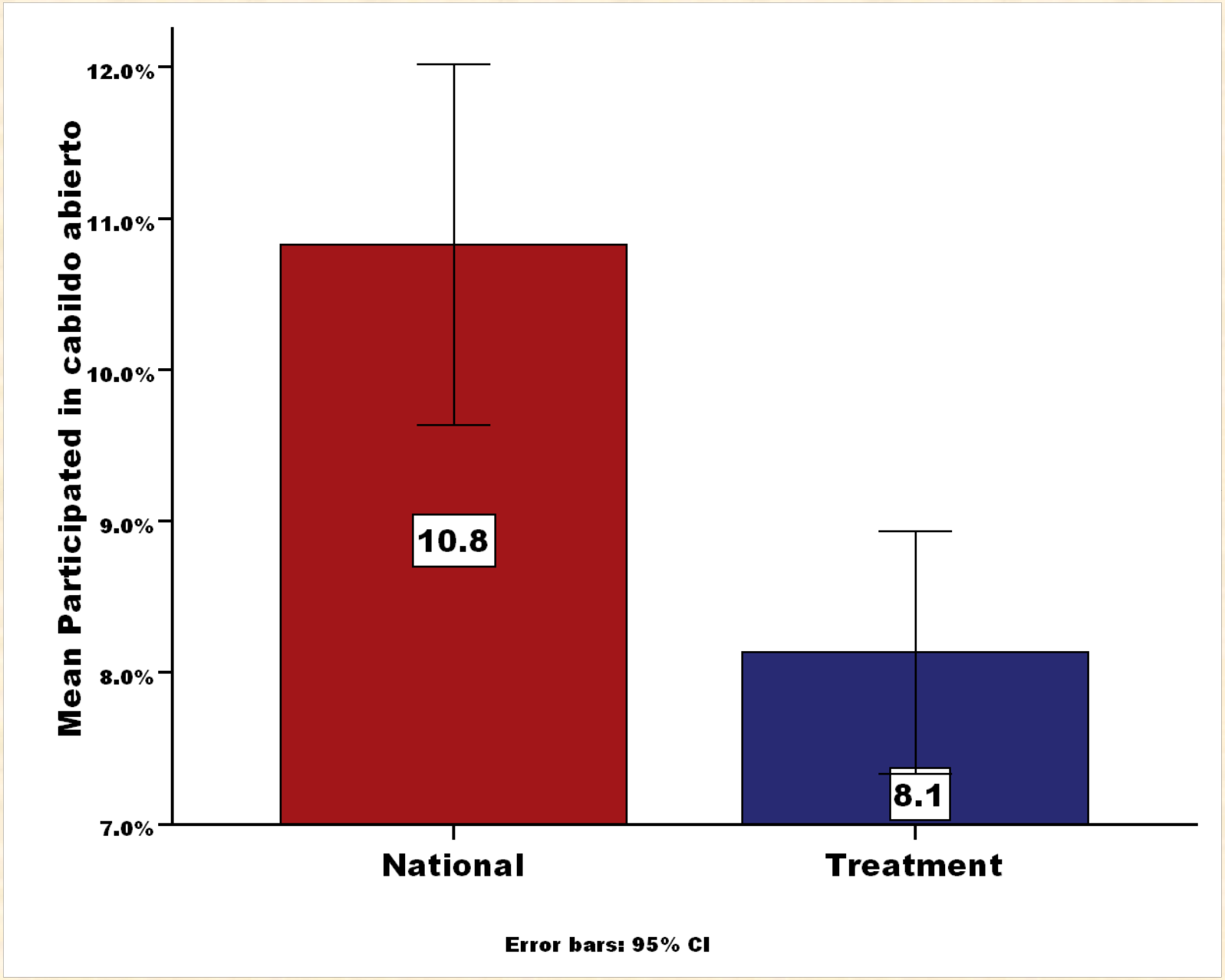


Note that some cantons deviate sharply from the national average, while others are quite close to it

- But... selected municipalities are **all** lower in corruption than the nation as a whole
- Time to reexamine premises of intervention
- But do we do this, or do we merely **assume** we have a problem?
- Hence a key step is to “pay attention to the data!”

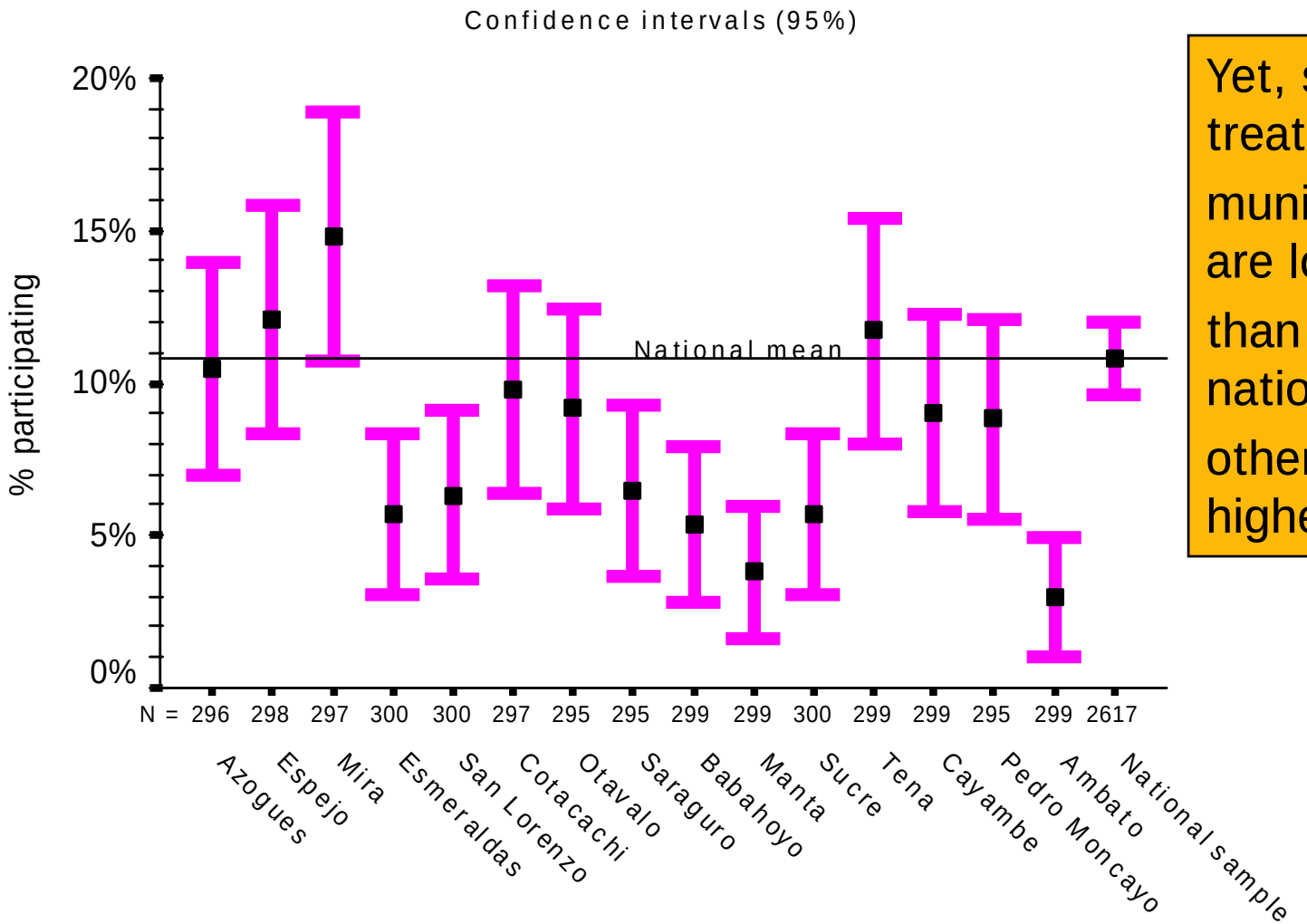


Second try... refocus on municipal participation: sample area seems low



Beware of aggregation!

Participation in "cabildos abiertos" by municipio



Yet, some treatment municipalities are lower than the national, while others are higher

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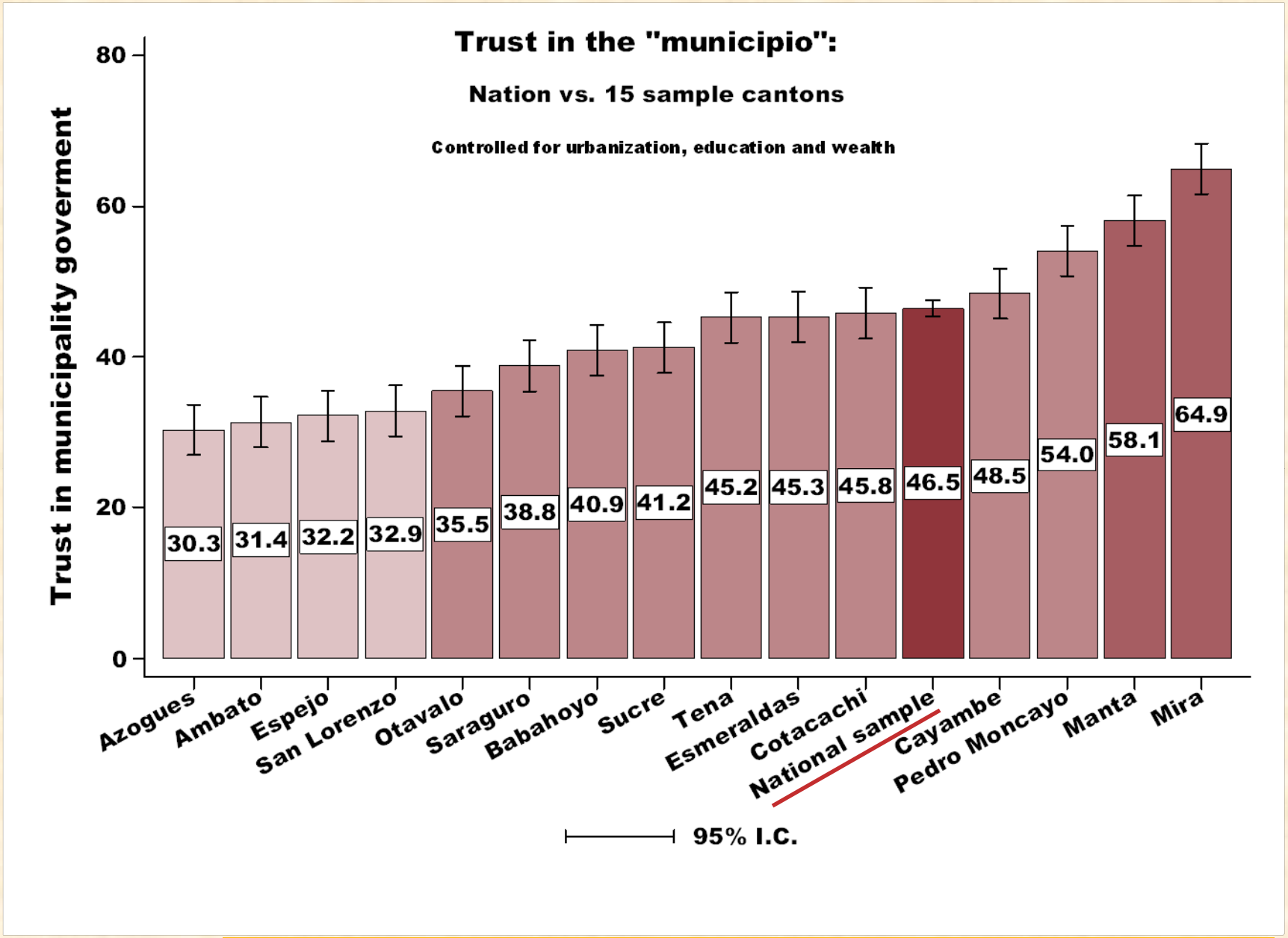
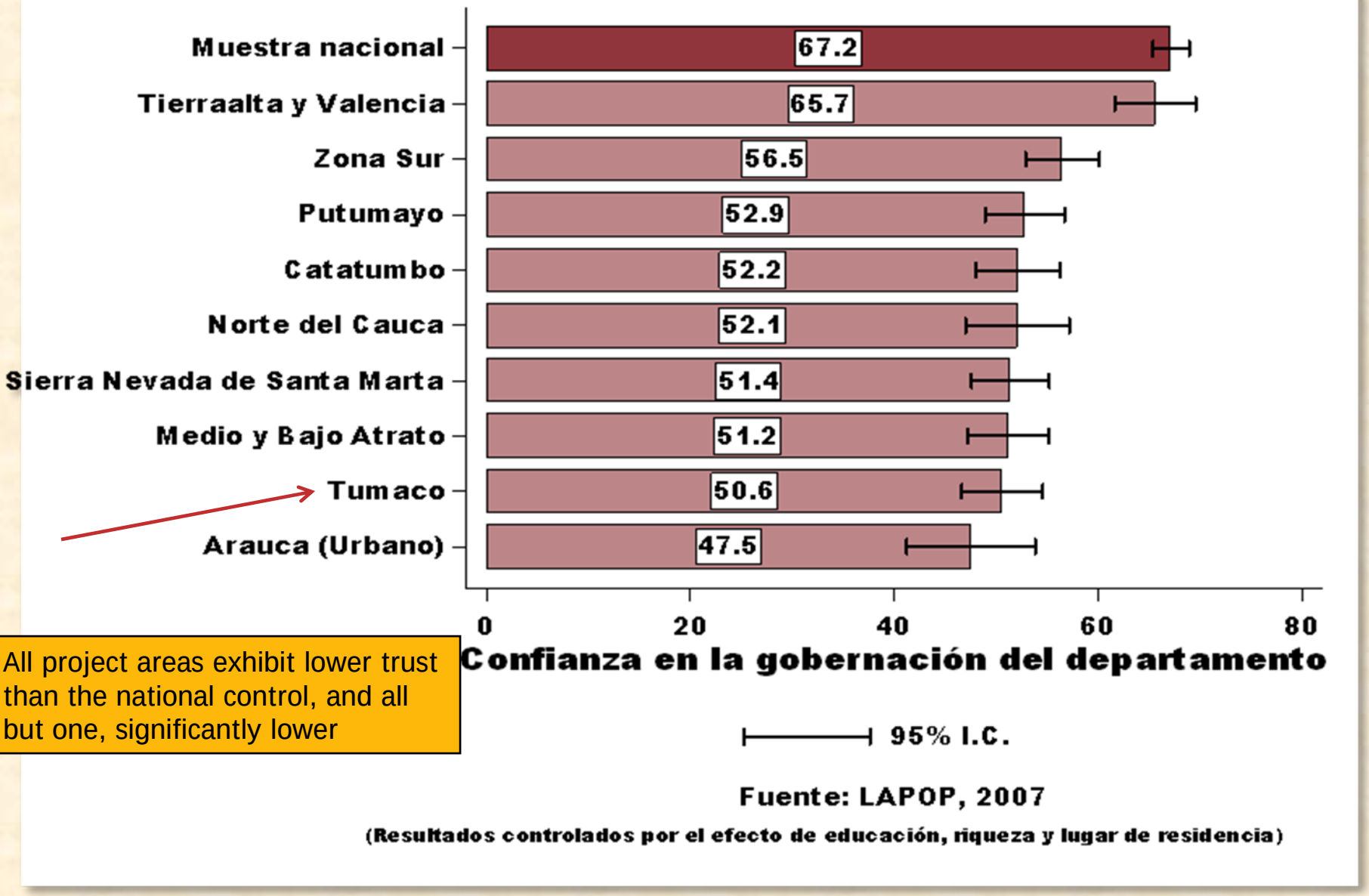


Trust in the municipal government also varies, yet some cantons are higher than the nation as a whole

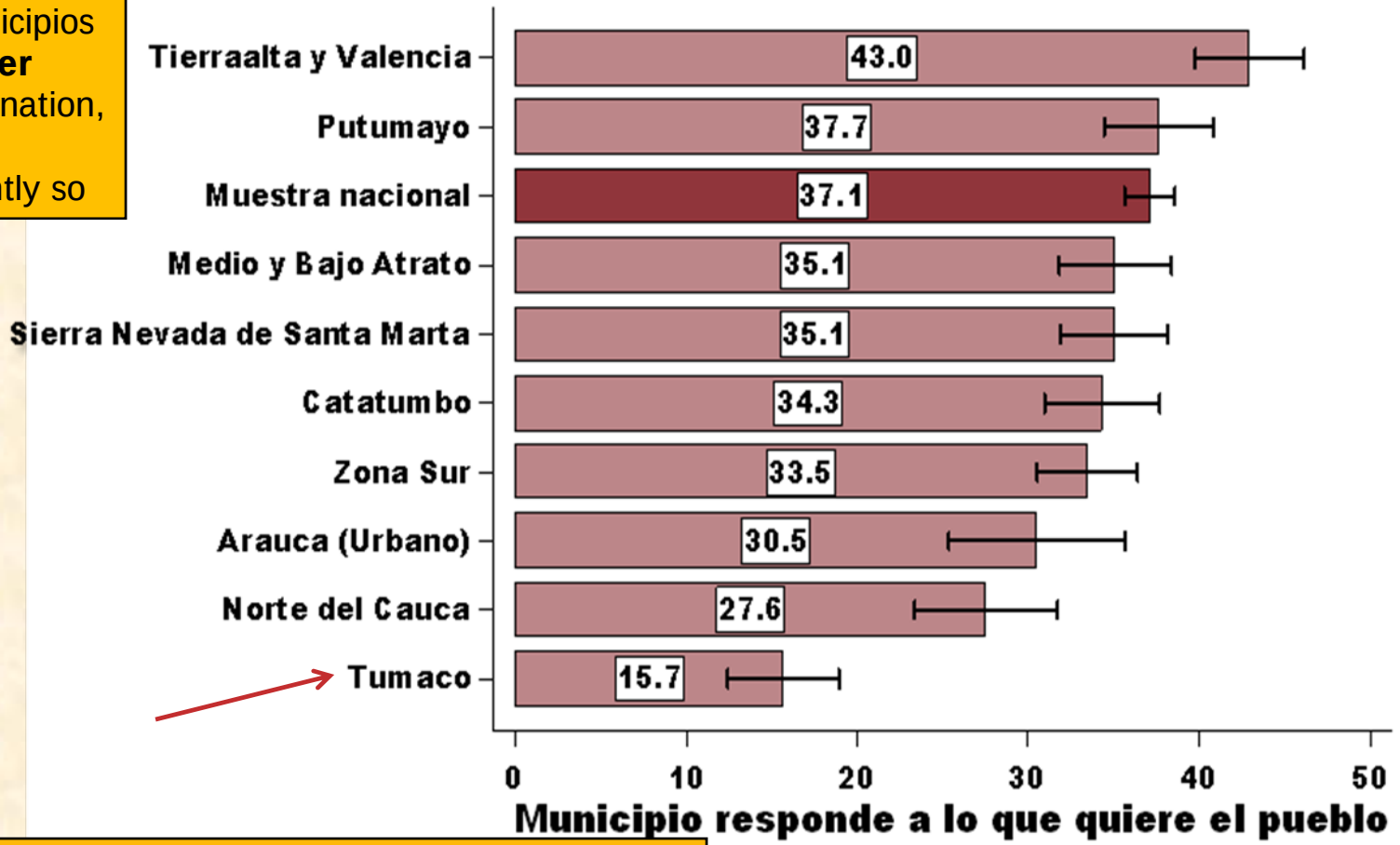
Baseline results: Trust in departmental governance, Colombia, 2007 sample



All project areas exhibit lower trust than the national control, and all but one, significantly lower

Baseline Results: Responsiveness of local government to citizen wishes
Colombia, 2007 sample

Two municipios are **higher** than the nation, one significantly so



Note that Tumaco baseline is low on trust and responsiveness. Project team needs to understand why and perhaps increase effort there.

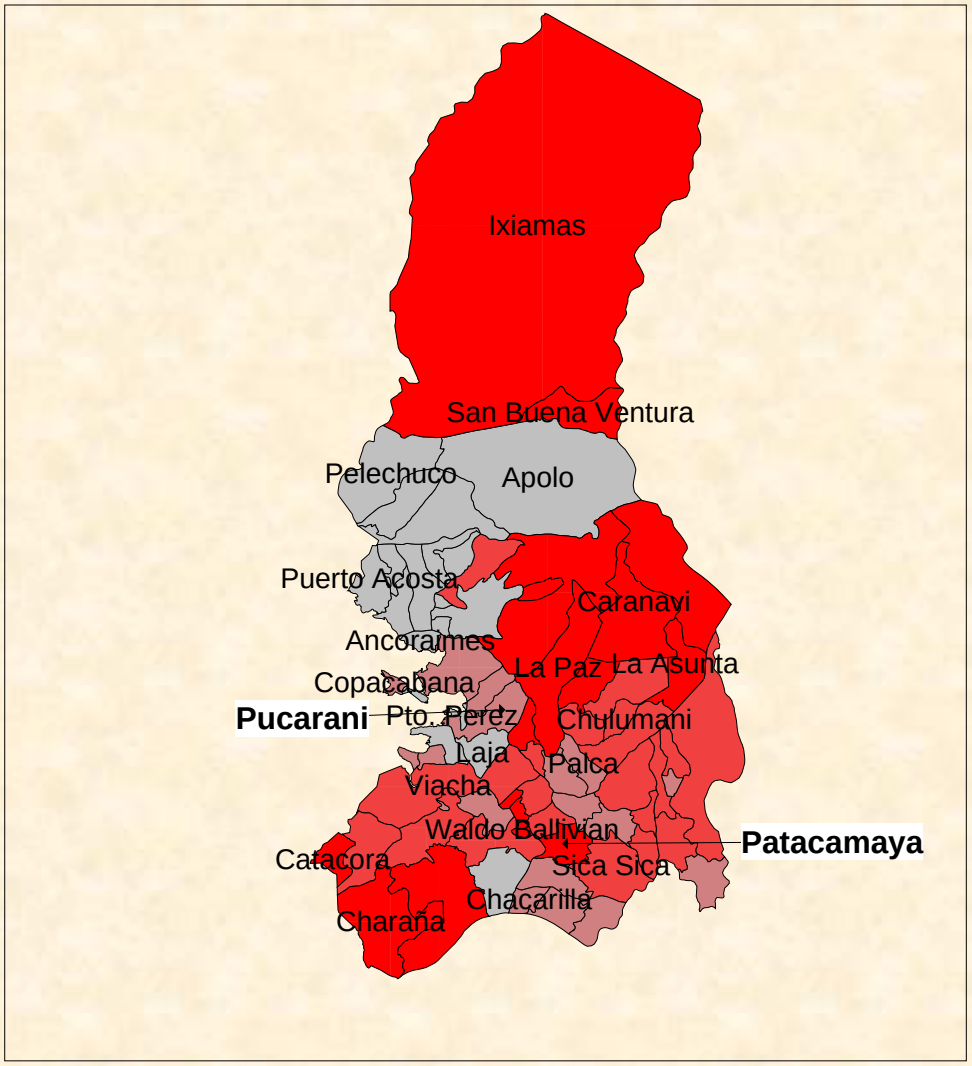
The Importance of disaggregation of findings

Cautionary tale:

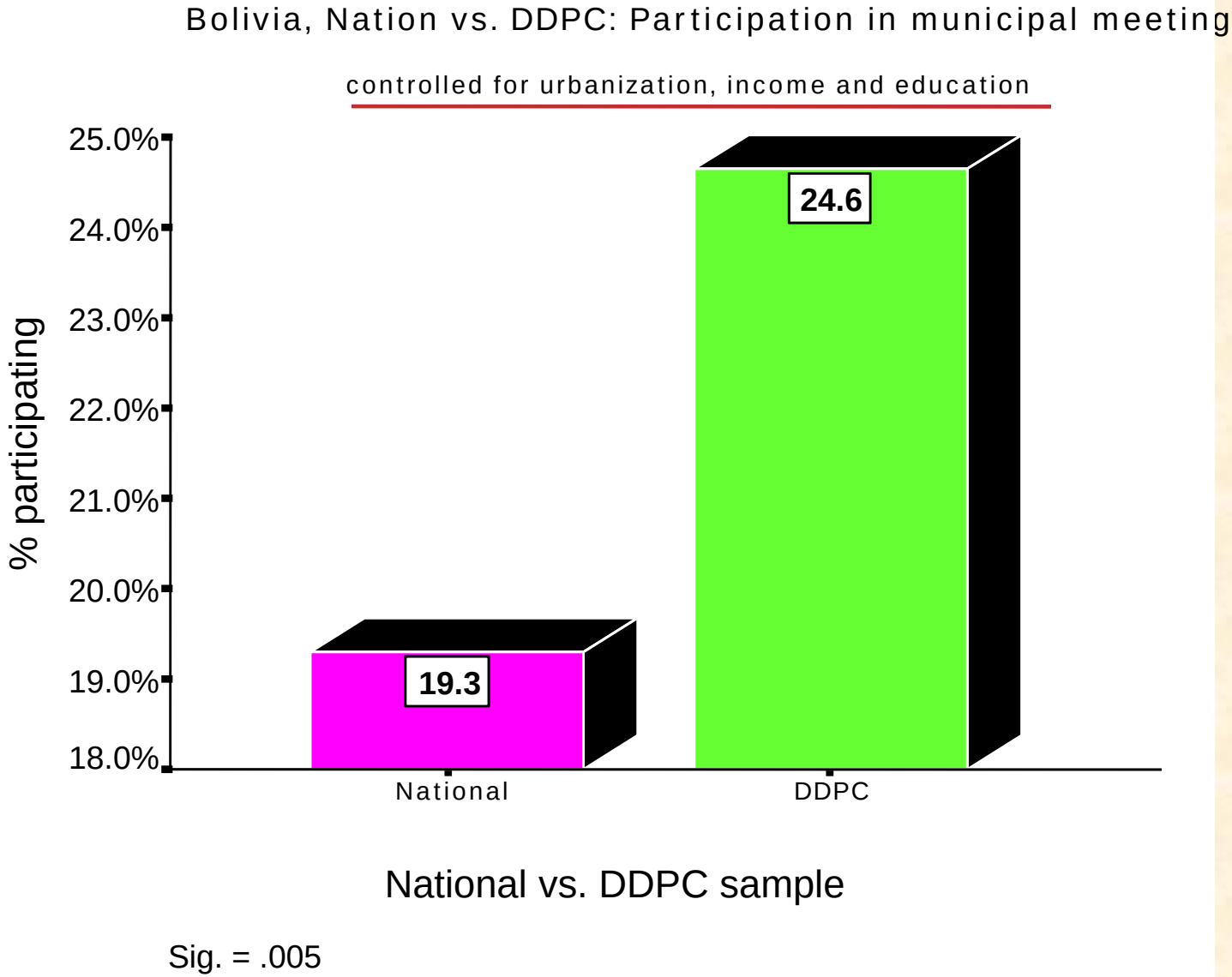
Sex Matters!

(but you already knew that)

Department of La Paz, Bolivia:
Municipal Development Projects



At end of project, treatment areas are higher than nation



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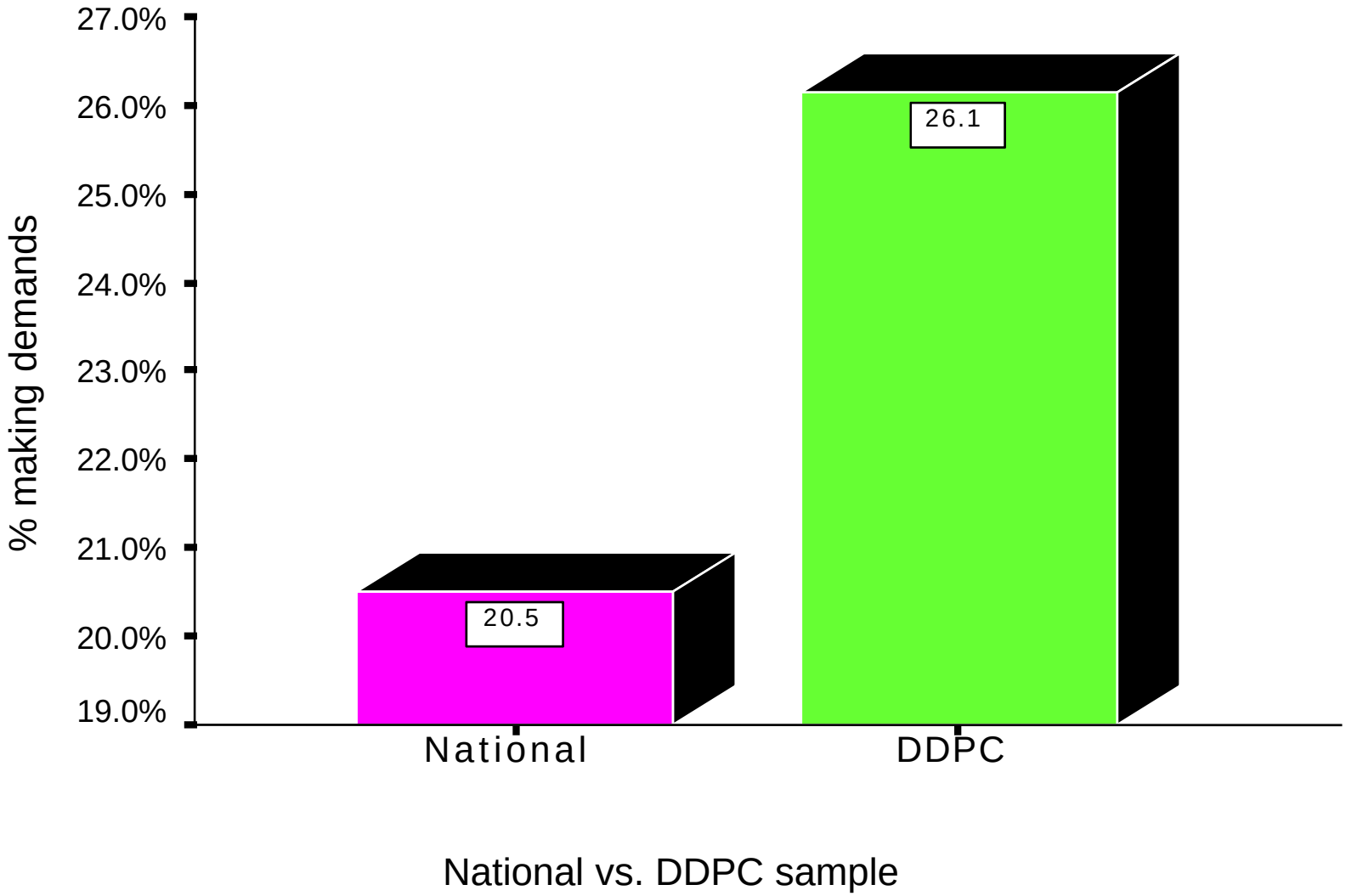
Bolivia: Nation vs. DDPC, Demand-making on local government

controlled for urbanization, income and education



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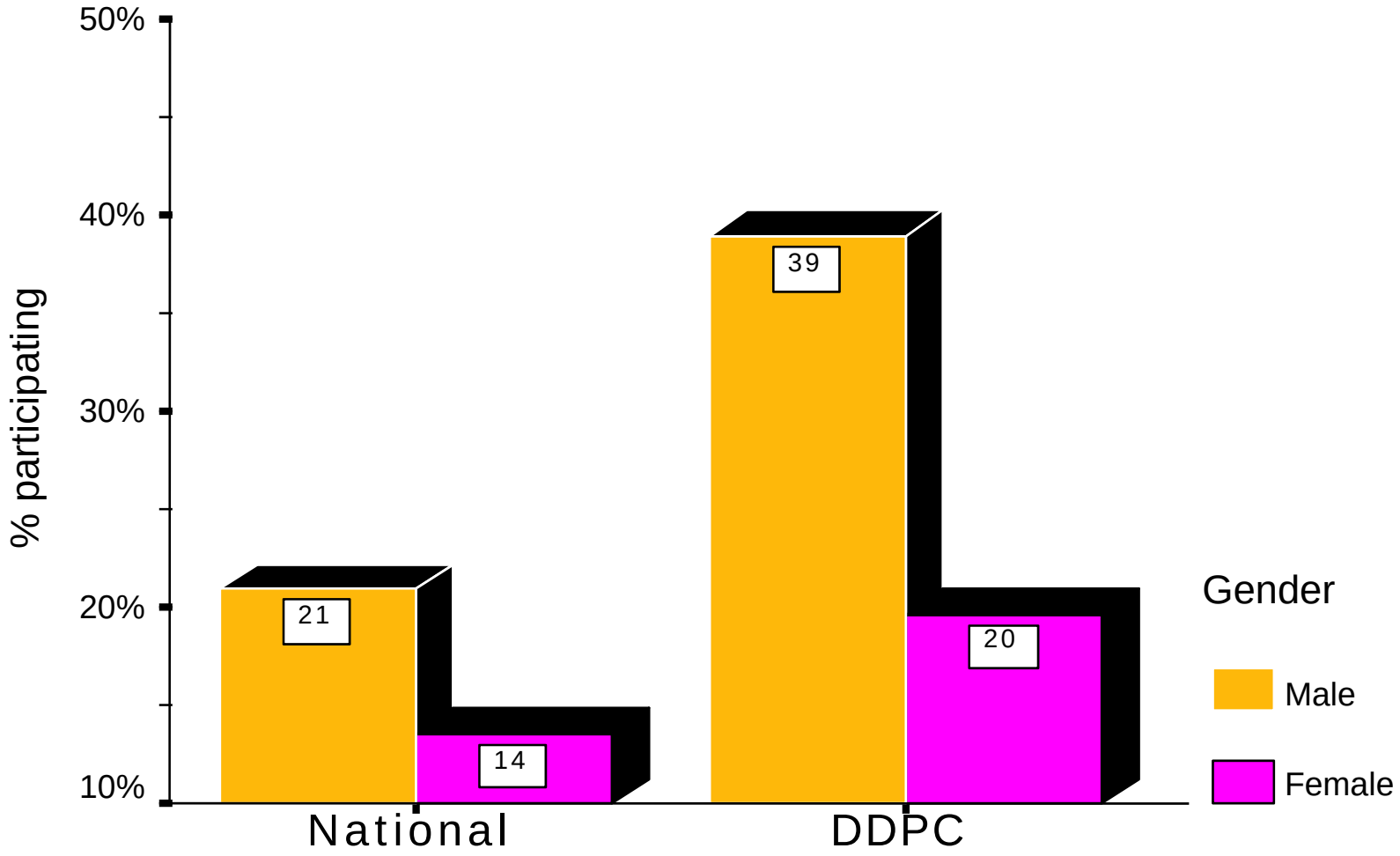
But.... don't ignore sex!

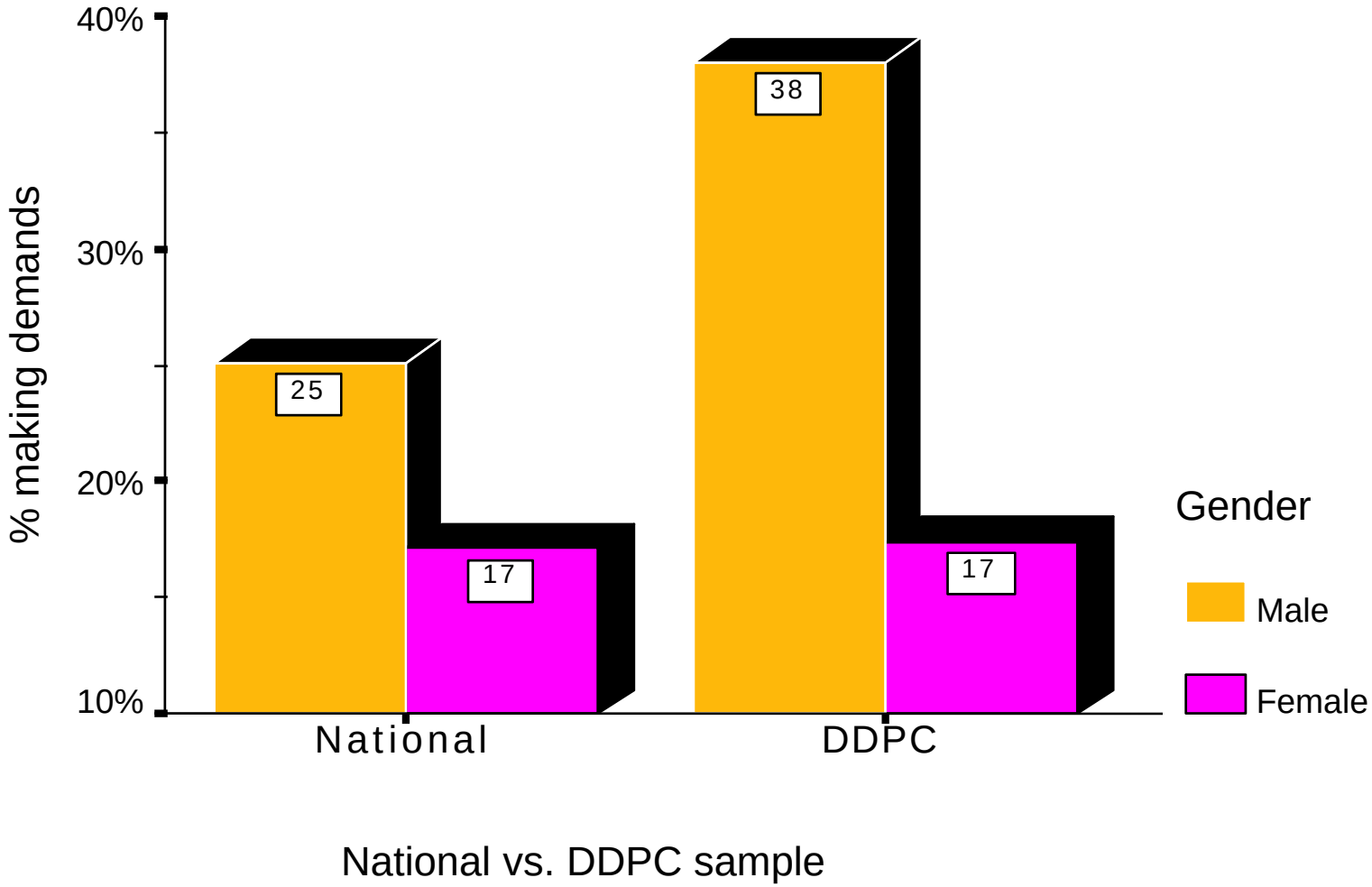
Bolivia, National vs. DDPC: Participation in municipal meeting by gender



National vs. DDPC sample

Sig. < .001 (uncontrolled for differences between national and DDPC)

Bolivia, National vs. DDPC: Demand-making on municipal government by gender



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Entire impact of program was on males

Latin American Public Opinion Project

LAPOP

Proyecto de Opinión Pública de América Latina

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